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'... and now it's over to you': recognising and supporting the role of careers leaders in schools in England

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ABSTRACT

There is a long history of teachers and schools being involved in the delivery of career education and guidance. As the breadth of career education and guidance activity in English schools grew throughout the twentieth century it became increasingly necessary to have an individual within the school responsible for leading and managing this activity (the careers leader). The transfer of responsibility for career guidance from local authorities to schools following the Education Act 2011 has intensified the need for this role. There have been various attempts to conceptualise and professionalise the role of careers leader and to develop appropriate training and support. This article defines the role and the rationale for the role, sets out its history and makes recommendations for the future professionalisation of the role. It is argued that this will include recognition of the role by policy, professionalisation and the development of a career structure and the development of appropriate training and CPD.

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Introduction

Young people are facing increasingly complex transitions from learning to work. The period of transition is lengthening and young people are asked to navigate a complex range of educational and vocational options as they move towards their working lives (Dorsett & Lucchino, 2015; Hutchinson & Kettlewell, 2015; Lanning, 2012). In England the frequency of system and qualification reform and redesign means that these journeys of transition are pursued across shifting sands (Hodgson & Spours, 2008). Furthermore, once young people enter the workplace the challenges continue as they move into a dynamic labour market where the capacity to adapt, shift and make career changes remains critical (Bimrose & Brown, 2015; Nota, Ginevra, Santilli, & Soresi, 2014; Ohme & Zacher, 2015).

Given the complexity of school-to-work, and school-to-further study, transitions, and the contemporary labour market, careers work in schools plays a critical role. It can help young people to make an effective transition and to build their skills for managing their participation in the labour and learning markets (career management skills) (Christensen & Sogaard Larsen, 2011; Hirschi & Läge, 2008). Careers work in schools has also been found to have a number of important secondary benefits in engaging young people in learning, retaining them in school and helping them to attain good academic qualifications (Hooley, Marriott, & Sampson, 2011; Hooley, Matheson, & Watts, 2014).

There are a wide range of ways in which school-based career education and guidance can be organised. An international review conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2004) concluded that there were three main models through which careers

work in schools could be delivered. These were: an *internal* model, where support is provided by school-based guidance counsellors (e.g. in the Republic of Ireland, the U.S.A. and many countries in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asia); an *external* model, where career development support is seen as an external service and where schools have limited responsibility for its delivery (e.g. in Germany); and a *partnership* model, where support is offered by a combination of the school and an external agency. In 2004 the OECD observed this model in England, other parts of the U.K. and in countries such as the Netherlands and New Zealand and concluded that it represented the strongest of the three models. However, subsequently the partnership model has been eroded in many of these countries including England which is in the process of transitioning to a new, school-commissioning model. Within each of these systems the roles that teachers and middle and senior leaders play vary (Hooley, Watts, & Andrews, 2015).

This article is based on a detailed examination of research into the organisation of careers work in English secondary schools. It will use this research to argue for the development of the approach to careers in England through the strengthening of the careers leader role. While this discussion is particular to the English context we hope that it will also be of wider relevance in thinking about the development of other systems elsewhere in the U.K. and the world.

The article will begin by tracing the evolution of the role of managing careers work in schools. We ascribe to this particular middle leader the job title 'careers leader'. This historical perspective is provided to help to ground the later, more conceptual discussion of how the role could be developed. The fact that the antecedents of the careers leader role have been in existence for decades is confirming for our argument about the importance of the role and provides a range of resources which can be drawn on in thinking about the role's development. We argue that the importance of a middle leader with day-to-day responsibility for leading and managing career education and guidance has been heightened by the move away from the partnership model in England for the delivery of career support in England. Following this historical discussion we move on to define the role of careers leader and discuss the implications of further developing and professionalising such a role in English schools.

Background and context

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, and for the first decade of the present century, the U.K. adopted a partnership approach to career education and guidance in schools (Andrews, 2011). Schools provided a library of career information and programmes of career education in the curriculum, and referred pupils to a national career guidance service, locally delivered, for guidance interviews. In turn the external service often offered support to schools with establishing and maintaining their careers libraries and reviewing and developing their schemes of work for career education.

The partnership model was based on the principle that the school and the external careers service contributed complementary sets of knowledge and expertise. The school knew the pupils well and teachers had expertise in teaching and curriculum planning; the careers service had knowledge of the labour market, and opportunities in further and higher education and in training, and was staffed by professionally qualified advisers with expertise in providing individual career guidance. This approach survived in England for 40 years through several different versions of the external service, from the introduction of local education authority careers services in 1973, through the eras of privatised careers services in the 1990s and Connexions in the 2000s, to the removal of local authority responsibility to provide universal career guidance in the Education Act 2011 (Hooley & Watts, 2011; Peck, 2004; Watts, 2013). Indeed, the partnership did more than survive, it became increasingly more integrated, evolving from a *parallel* model, characterised by a minimum of interaction or information flow between the school and the career service, to a *pyramidal* model, in which the guidance interview was seen as the culmination of a career education process (Morris, Simkin, & Stoney, 1995). However, in the pyramidal model the school and careers service

continued to work fairly separately. Finally, in some schools there was the emergence of the *guidance community* model, in which career advisers were actively involved in the process of curriculum planning and review and schools provided the advisers with detailed information on the young people.

While the partnership model continues to operate in the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Education Act 2011 has changed the approach in England. Local authorities are no longer required, or funded, to provide a universal careers service. Instead schools have been given a new statutory duty to secure access to independent career guidance for their pupils (Watts, 2012). Local authorities are still required to offer career and personal support to young people deemed to be 'vulnerable or disadvantaged' although the definition of who is vulnerable is often narrowing alongside the local authorities' capacity to provide such support with squeezed budgets (Langley, Hooley, & Bertuchi, 2014). But schools have responsibility for securing services for all other pupils. This adds two more tasks to the role of coordinating careers work in schools: firstly, commissioning career guidance services; secondly monitoring pupils' access to guidance from potentially two separate providers (the local authority provider of targeted services and the service that is commissioned to support the rest of the school population). Alternatively, some schools have appointed career guidance staff within the school. Numbers drawn from the School Workforce Census suggest that the number of schools employing career advisers rose from 450 in 2010 to 660 in 2013 (Hooley, 2015). This in turn creates a requirement for such careers specialist staff to be led and managed. Later versions of the government's statutory guidance for schools emphasise the need for schools to enable pupils to have more direct contact with employers and with providers of further and higher education and apprenticeships (Department for Education [DfE], 2014, 2015). Many schools had already developed such links but this work is now solely the responsibility of the school rather than the partnership organisation. This also adds to the workload of the member of staff with day-to-day management responsibility for careers work in the school.

The change in policy, with its origins in the government's dual commitments to school autonomy and the use of market or quasi-market mechanisms within the education system, has placed the school at the centre of making career support available to its pupils (Watts, 2013). For the arrangements to work in practice, schools will need to appoint or identify middle leaders to take responsibility for the leadership and management of careers work in school and provide them with access to continuing professional development (CPD) to equip them to take on the role. The remainder of this article will clarify the role of these careers leaders, examine conditions for the role to be recognised and set out a case for appropriate CPD.

The professional context

The delivery of career education and guidance within schools is a complex multi-professional endeavour. In England it is common for the following members of school staff to be involved, in complementary but overlapping roles. Teachers may be involved in designing programmes of career education, teaching careers lessons and, in their pastoral roles, providing initial information and advice to pupils. School librarians may be involved in making available information on the labour market and opportunities in education and training. Administrative and support staff may organise careers activities and members of the middle and senior leadership teams take responsibility for coordinating and managing the school's provision of career education and guidance. In addition, a range of external stakeholders are often critical to the delivery of career education and guidance. Principal among the external partners are career advisers providing career guidance, although some schools in England have now appointed advisers to their own staff, so that they have become internal contributors. Other external contributors include employers and employees, colleges of further education, universities, apprenticeship providers, parents and alumni.

The boundary crossing nature of career, being based within the education system but always looking out, means that multi-professional working is essential. However, the existence of multi-

professional working necessitates that the different roles are clearly demarcated to ensure that they are complementary. Where the distinctions between these different roles are poorly understood there is the potential for confusion, duplication and missed opportunities, for rivalries between different roles and, ultimately, for misdirection of young people.

Research commissioned by Teach First in England identified six roles that teachers play in career education and guidance (Hooley et al., 2015). In tutorial roles all teachers can act as *career informants*, sharing information with pupils about their own career pathways and choices, and as *pastoral tutors* they can offer initial information and advice on option choices, help identify guidance needs and refer pupils to career advisers. In teaching roles, *subject teachers* can help pupils relate their subject learning to applications in the workplace, explain the progression opportunities from their subject and contribute to career education through cross-curricular work, and *careers teachers* can teach programmes of career education in discrete lessons or within PSHE education. Then there are two leadership roles, which may be filled by teachers but may instead be allocated to non-teaching members of the middle and senior leadership teams. These are the roles of *careers leader*, with responsibility for the day-to-day leadership and management of career education and guidance, and a *senior leader* who has oversight of career education and guidance across the school. For the delivery of career education and guidance in schools to be both efficient and effective, the distinctions and relationships between these different roles need to be understood by all contributors. The respective and related roles of other school staff, such as career advisers, librarians and support staff, also need to be made explicit.

Although it could appear that the contributions of the various external partners are more clearly demarcated, confusion can still arise. For example, recent policy announcements in England have emphasised the importance of employers over career advisers. There is extensive research which highlights the value that interactions with employers can have for young people (Mann & Dawkins, 2014). However, such interactions need to take place within a pedagogic framework which supports young people to successfully learn from such encounters. Careers leaders have a critical role in creating such a framework through their role in designing schools' careers programmes. In addition, if access to employers is going to be provided to a wide range of individuals and to be most effective it requires brokerage, effective preparation and follow up and the provision of broader contextual information (what other opportunities exist) and specific technical information (e.g. the links between qualifications and career). These roles are usually played by careers professionals of one kind or another. It is important also not only to clarify the respective roles of internal and external partners, but also to maximise the benefits of the partnership approach.

The relationships between the roles of career adviser and careers leader need to be clearly understood. Career advisers provide career guidance to individuals in one-to-one encounters or small group settings; careers leaders take responsibility for the day-to-day leadership and management of careers work in the organisation (Careers Profession Taskforce, 2010). These are two distinct, but mutually supportive, professional roles (Hooley, Johnson, & Neary, 2016). Traditionally the roles have been filled by different individuals but, partly as a result of the change policy in England, variations of the partnership arrangement are emerging (Bimrose et al., 2014). In some schools the career adviser commissioned by the school, or directly employed by the school, is being asked to take on the role of careers leader as well. In others the careers leader is undertaking a qualification in career guidance in order to take on the role of career adviser.

For this complex set of inter-related roles to work effectively there needs to be efficient middle leadership from a member of the school staff, who can coordinate the respective contributions of internal and external partners into a coherent and integrated programme of support for young people. This careers leader needs, in turn, clear line management support from a designated member of the senior leadership team. A careers leader at the centre of the web of activity is critical for this aspect of a school's work to function well.

The development of the careers leader role

In the early years of the partnership model in England, when the guidance interview was viewed as the pre-eminent element of the partnership, the role of the member of staff with responsibility for careers was to manage the careers library, plan and teach the career education lessons and provide facilities for the career advisers to conduct their interviews, all in preparation for the careers interview. The post was usually filled by a teacher who was given additional responsibility for careers and often given the title careers teacher. Few, if any, other members of staff were involved, and the role was rarely viewed as a management position.

As career education and guidance developed in schools other teachers were asked to teach careers lessons, tutors were asked to provide information and advice to pupils and a wider range of external partners were invited to contribute to the programme. At this stage the role developed into a middle manager, coordinating the work of other teachers and tutors involved in career education and guidance, negotiating a partnership agreement with the careers service and managing the links between careers work and related activities such as tutoring, recording achievement and school-business links. Job titles such as 'head of careers' and 'careers coordinator' were used (Andrews, 2004). In many schools the post was still filled by a teacher, but up to one in four schools recruited people from non-teaching roles to take on these tasks (McCrone et al., 2009). One of the main reasons why a substantial number of schools appointed individuals other than teachers to the role was a recognition that a teacher with a subject teaching commitment could not devote the time needed to fulfil the growing list of responsibilities associated with the role of coordinating careers and did not have the flexibility to be able to respond to the needs of pupils at the times when they arose or to communicate with employers and other partners contributing to the careers programme (Andrews, 2005).

The term 'middle leader' began to gain currency in schools in the 1990s, when the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) defined standards not only for Qualified Teacher Status but also for Headship and Subject Leadership. The core purpose of a subject leader was defined as 'to provide professional leadership and management for a subject to secure high quality teaching, effective use of resources and improved standards of learning and achievement for all pupils' (Teacher Training Agency [TTA], 1998, p. 4). The term subject leader was, however, almost exclusively applied only to heads of department in traditional subject areas. In an attempt to gain recognition of the role of careers coordinator being a middle leader of career education and guidance, the National Association of Careers and Guidance Teachers worked with the TTA to exemplify the National Standards for Subject Leaders for the role of careers coordinator (National Association of Careers and Guidance Teachers [NACGT], 1999). These standards set out: the core purpose of the role; the key outcomes of careers coordination and leadership for pupils, teachers, parents, headteachers and governors, and other adults in the school and its community including career advisers; the professional knowledge, understanding, skills and attributes required. The final section identified the key leadership and management tasks under four main headings: strategic direction and development; teaching and learning; leading and managing staff; efficient and effective deployment of staff and resources. This document, published by the then professional association for careers coordinators, was intended to set out clear expectations of the role and to help careers coordinators and their schools identify professional development needs. The standards were not adopted by the government of the day but they laid the foundations for defining the role of careers leader today.

What does a careers leader do?

Over the years since the subject leader standards were exemplified for the role of careers coordinator there have been several attempts to specify the role of careers leader in schools (e.g. Andrews, 2004; Hooley et al., 2015; McCrone et al., 2009), each one building on previous iterations and taking account of the changing context. These have culminated in a strand of the National Occupational

Standards for Career Development in the U.K. (Career Development Institute [CDI], 2014), which lists 19 performance criteria for leading and managing career development work in an organisation. If the tasks are interpreted for the role of careers leader in a school in England they can be analysed to fall into four categories: leadership; management; internal coordination; external networking. Most of the management functions can be described as 'project management': careers leaders usually have very few line management tasks although it is possible that this will grow if the tendency for schools to appoint internal career advisers increases. However, careers leaders do manage teams of colleagues for particular aspects of career education and guidance at certain times in the school week and calendar.

Based on the way that the role has been defined in previous exemplifications of the careers leader including the National Occupational Standards it is possible to propose a taxonomy of the tasks that comprise careers leadership. These are organised under the headings of leadership, management, coordination and networking and are set out in [Figure 1](#).

All of these tasks are important for the effective delivery of career education and guidance in schools. However, it is possible to allocate these tasks to a number of members of staff, for example, identifying a senior leader to take on most of the leadership tasks while a non-teaching careers coordinator takes on most of the coordination tasks and so on. However, there are likely to be advantages for the coherence of a school's programme for a single individual or small group to manage these. Where all or most of these tasks are all the responsibility of a single individual they begin to look like a job description for a middle leadership role.

Leadership

- Advising senior leadership on policy, strategy and resources for career education and guidance
- Reporting to senior leaders and governors
- Reviewing and evaluating career education and guidance
- Preparing and implementing a career education and guidance development plan
- Maintaining own CPD

Management

Project management

- Planning schemes of work for career education
- Briefing and supporting teachers of career education and tutors providing initial information and advice
- Monitoring teaching and learning in career education
- Monitoring access to, and take up of, career guidance

Line management

- Managing the work of the careers adviser, administrator and other related staff

Coordination

- Managing the provision of career information
- Liaising with PSHE leader and other subject leaders to plan career education
- Liaising with tutorial managers, mentors, SENCO and head of sixth to identify pupils needing guidance
- Referring pupils to career advisers

Networking

- Establishing, maintaining and developing links with employers
- Establishing, maintaining and developing links with FE colleges, universities and apprenticeship providers
- Negotiating service level agreements with local authority
- Commissioning career guidance services

Figure 1. A taxonomy of careers leadership tasks.

Training for the role

Over the past 40–50 years a variety of organisations have offered training courses for careers teachers, heads of careers, careers coordinators and careers leaders. The professional bodies for careers (National Association of Careers and Guidance Teachers, Association for Careers Education and Guidance, Institute of Career Guidance, Career Development Institute), local authorities, careers companies, Connexions and private CPD providers have all offered non-accredited courses. At various points in time the government has made available funding to support the training of careers staff in schools, through, for example, the grants for in-service training that were made available via local education authorities and the budgets for the privatised careers services and Connexions. Several universities have provided accredited CPD for career education and guidance in the form of Certificate and Diploma courses (Andrews, 2013). However, throughout this time no more than 50% of career leaders held a professional qualification in careers (McCrone et al., 2009). It has always been a deep irony that the one person in schools who should be promoting the need for training and qualifications for jobs is all too often the one person without any training for their job. Some provision of CPD remains available today but the number of courses has declined as government funding has been reduced and school budgets have become tighter. In recent years accredited courses have closed at Cambridge University, Manchester Metropolitan University and London South Bank University.

There have been four attempts in the past 25 years to introduce a national professional qualification for leaders of careers work in schools. In 1990 the government commissioned the production of an open learning pack (Department of Education and Science [DES], 1990) which was implemented by the Open College. The contents included a wealth of good material, much of which would still be relevant today with minor updating, but the programme fell down because it did not put in place adequate tutorial support for participants. Fourteen years later, the then Department for Education and Employment launched a pilot NVQ Level 4 in Coordinating Careers Education and Guidance. This too suffered from a lack of attention to supporting teachers and others working through the assignments, plus many of the teachers in the careers coordinator role at the time did not favour the competence-based approach to CPD. It did not continue beyond the pilot. In 2009 the government accepted the need for a national professional qualification for careers leaders in schools and commissioned a feasibility study (McCrone et al., 2009). The study made recommendations and proposed a framework for a Qualification in Careers Leadership but unfortunately by the time the report was published the recession had hit the public sector and there was no longer any money available to implement the proposal. At the time of writing Teach First is trialling an eight-module programme of CPD for what it refers to as Careers and Employability Leaders, with teachers from 15 schools. The pilot is delivered through an approach where participants receive taught elements and are offered support between sessions. The programme has been expanded to a further 45 schools. The issues yet to address are accreditation and funding for future years.

Perceptions of the role

The evolution of the role from careers teacher, through head of careers or careers coordinator to careers leader has been outlined above but this has not led to a situation where the role is perceived and organised in the same way across all secondary schools in England. Leadership arrangements for career education and guidance in schools differ in three main respects.

Firstly, there is a lack of consensus about the nature of the role between schools and among different groups of staff with schools. A study of the career development of careers coordinators (Andrews & Barnes, 2003) found that, in general, staff in schools viewed the role as largely administrative whereas the careers coordinators themselves saw themselves as coordinators of staff within the school and networkers with external partners, while acknowledging that they also undertook a range of administrative tasks. Half the coordinators who completed the survey described themselves

in terms that indicated they were proactive leaders, looking to develop careers work in school, rather than only coordinators of the existing provision. Headteachers were split between those who saw the role as leading an important part of the school's work, linked to pupils' aspirations and future progression, and those that saw it as largely an administrative job.

Secondly, schools assign the leadership tasks in different ways. In some schools all the tasks are put together into a single role specification and the postholder has responsibility for career education and guidance across the whole school. In others the tasks are delegated to several middle leaders or the role is divided between two middle leaders, with one in charge of careers work in the main school and the other responsible for sixth form work.

Thirdly, careers leaders come from a range of professional backgrounds. It is still common to find the role given to a teacher but over the past 10 years or more schools have appointed individuals from other professional backgrounds to the position. Some of these appointments have been internal, from librarians, learning support assistants and mentors for example, while others have been external, from a wide variety of backgrounds such as career advisers, human resources managers, commerce, etc. (McCrone et al., 2009).

This diversity of approaches is not a problem in itself, however, in the absence of any regulation of the quality of careers work in schools or any nationally agreed standards for careers leadership, there is a danger that it results in an inequality of outcome for young people. A succession of research papers published about careers work in schools suggests that this is the case and highlights the patchiness of current provision (summarised in Hooley et al., 2014). Perhaps even more worryingly recent work by Archer and Moote (2016) suggests that the availability of career support is contoured by socio-economic class, with more disadvantaged students less likely to receive support. There are undoubtedly a range of legitimate ways to organise career education and guidance within schools, but it is clear that well organised and effective programmes do not simply emerge organically or evenly across the country. There is a need for purposeful leadership and careful management if all of the complex elements and actors involved in a careers programme are to be effectively delivered. There is also a clear need for someone within the school to hold the accountability for the delivery of this activity. It is possible for individuals from a wide range of professional background to take on this role but it is important that they have access to professional development to equip them to fulfil all the tasks identified. It follows, therefore, that the role of careers leader needs to be acknowledged and defined, and that appropriate CPD needs to be made available.

Moving towards twenty-first-century careers leadership

So far we have argued that there is a need for careers leadership in schools. This has always been the case, but it has been exacerbated in England by the implementation of the Education Act 2011 and the movement of responsibility for career guidance to schools. The careers leader role builds on a long tradition of practice which has received episodic support from policy and has correspondingly waxed and waned over the years. However, throughout this tradition there has been considerable thinking about the nature of the role of careers leadership which can inform the future direction of the role.

If the role of careers leader is to become more strongly embedded in the English education system there are three key areas which need to be developed: the role needs to be recognised in policy; professionalised and linked to professional career progression; and a national training and CPD offer needs to be established.

Recognition in policy

Because the role of the member of staff with responsibility for career education and guidance in schools has grown and developed gradually over time, and because the relationship of this role with related roles, such as career adviser, has often been confused, or at least blurred, schools have not always acknowledged the role in policy or practice.

The new policy arrangements for career education and guidance in England place schools firmly at the centre which increases the importance of the school's capacity to manage and coordinate careers programmes. Given this, government needs to recognise that schools need to have someone who is identified as the leader of their careers activity. One way that government could achieve this would be to require, in the statutory guidance, that all schools identify a careers leader. Such a move would make it far easier for government and the various agencies that are delivering careers work to interface with schools.

Beyond a formal acknowledgement of the existence of careers leaders it would also be useful if government could help build the evidence around careers leaders and how different arrangements work in practice, by finding out how schools organise career leadership, the professional background of career leaders, their reward and career progression and critically examining issues about qualifications, the professional knowledge base and the quality assurance of such roles. This article has set out the back story to this development, but the system is in transition and there is a desperate need to improve the feedback loop that supports future policymaking.

Professional recognition and career progression

Careers leaders do not constitute a profession on their own. The role is potentially part of a wider career profession, but many of its incumbents may not recognise this as their profession. Career advisers who move into the role have the most straightforward professional identity, but also may feel professional tensions as they operate in an environment where teachers set the culture and have much of the professional power. This is particularly the case in schools where careers work is seen as marginal by teachers, not part of their role and where the professionalism of careers advisers is not well understood. Conversely teachers in the role of careers leader have a professional identity already, that of being teacher, and may struggle to fit their emergent careers professionalism into this wider professional framework. The same applies for human resource managers and a wide range of other kinds of professionals who have been recruited into the careers leader role. While those individuals who have moved into the role from 'non-professional' jobs such as teaching assistants and learning mentors face the challenge of establishing the professional status of the role.

As discussed above, the role of careers leader has strategic, management and leadership components which require the use of a range of high level skills. As Law and Watts (2015, originally 1977) have noted the implementation of a career education and guidance programme within a school can be viewed as the interplay of power between different interests. They note that the definition of roles is a key arena within this power struggle. Consequently, the according of a clear role with associated professional status is critical to ensuring that careers work in schools gets done. However, the challenge is to acknowledge the professional status of the role while not trying to claim a new profession. This needs to accommodate both the 'hybrid professional', who combines the professional role of careers leader with their previous or continuing profession of teacher, career adviser, etc., and the non-professional, who would benefit from the recognition and support of being considered to be in a professional role.

Schools then need to think about where the postholder is located in their management structures to be able to fulfil the middle leadership tasks and how the person is appropriately rewarded and supported. For example, in Finland, Hong Kong, Korea, New Zealand and Switzerland a move to careers leadership usually results in a pay increase (Hooley et al., 2015).

The role of careers leader combines leadership and management of both internal and external stakeholders, whole school responsibilities and the need to develop curriculum and connect with the wider aims of the school. This combination of activities requires the incumbent to develop skills which are likely to be useful in more senior roles. In some other countries (notably Finland and Norway) the role of the careers leader is viewed as a career stepping stone to senior leadership (Hooley et al., 2015). If the role were better defined, understood and professionalised in England it is possible that it would attract strong, aspirational professionals.

Training and development

Throughout the history of the development of the role of careers leader in schools, no-one has come into the job as their first job: the post has always been filled by someone with previous employment history, be that in teaching, career guidance or many other jobs. No-one trains initially to be careers leader yet the role requires specific knowledge, understanding and skills. It follows that appropriate CPD should be made available. Furthermore, the provision of CPD needs to be organised in such a way that people can access it in a way that recognises their previous and individual experience and current expertise.

If we are to recognise the professional role of careers leader we will need to develop a nationally available professional qualification open to anyone taking on the role in schools. Three of the previous attempts failed and, if we are to sustain the fourth attempt (Teach First) beyond its current pilot stage, we will need to learn the lessons from the past. For careers leaders not on the Teach First pilot the only options for accredited CPD are to complete the three optional units of the Level 6 Diploma in Career Guidance and Development which constitute the Certificate in Careers Leadership conferred by the Career Development Institute (CDI) or one of the few remaining higher education certificates. Apart from those two options, there are several unaccredited opportunities. If we are to properly support careers leaders with CPD for which they can gain professional accreditation, we need to pool resources and expertise from Teach First, the CDI and the universities still providing courses in leading and managing career education and guidance, to develop a programme that will equip careers leaders with the knowledge, understanding and skills to undertake the role specified in [Figure 1](#). This will probably require some investment in development funding from the government but since it is the government that has given greater responsibility to schools for career education and guidance, a move to build the capacity of schools to address this responsibility would align well with the current direction of policy.

Conclusions

The shift to a school-based model of career education and guidance in England has intensified the need to develop schools' capacity to deliver higher quality careers programmes. The development of professional capacity lies at the heart of this task. This article has argued that professionalising a middle leadership role (the careers leader) offers a way forward that builds on existing practice and a long-standing if intermittent tradition in English schools.

To achieve effective middle leadership for careers we need to clearly articulate the role of the careers leader. This article has argued that this articulation should focus on leadership, management, coordination and networking. As this role develops it needs to be supported by policy makers, achieve professional recognition and have access to appropriate training and development.

There have been numerous attempts to establish the role of careers leader in the past. However, following recent policy developments, the role is now more important than ever. Given this it is critical that the role of careers leader is finally and definitively established as a core part of all English schools.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

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